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SIPDIS

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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SUBJECT: UNESCO: ROLLS OUT EDUCATION SECTOR REFORM TO MIXED REVIEWS

¶1. Summary. UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, Peter Smith, held an information meeting regarding Education Sector reform on January 13, 2006. The purpose of the meeting was to get buy-in for proposed Education Sector reforms from Member State Delegations. Unfortunately, the meeting muddled the waters and left several Delegations frustrated by the duration of the proposed implementation time frame. An Executive Board agenda item insisting that the reforms be implemented more rapidly than the proposed eighteen months is likely. Further, the Executive Board will demand intense cooperation from the non-Education Sectors of the Secretariat (e.g., Bureau of Strategic Planning, Bureau of the Budget, etc.) in the Education Sector reforms. End summary.

With the best of intentions

¶2. In an attempt to get buy-in from Member State Delegations for proposed Education Sector planning, budget and management reforms, Assistant Director-General Peter Smith held an information meeting on January 13, 2006. His attempt at inclusiveness, transparency and openness, -- exactly what the Member States have demanded from the UNESCO Secretariat -- was not successful. The meeting muddled the waters and split Delegations into two camps.

Preaching to the choir

¶4. Last summer, Peter Smith hired a U.S. firm, Navigant Consulting, to assist him in his efforts to transform the Education Sector following scathing assessments of the sector by the Member States at every Executive Board since the U.S. reentry. Because a clear roadmap for the next steps was not presented, the proposed 18-month implementation plan was met with skepticism. The delegate from Norway put it best when he pointed out to Smith that the situation is too urgent to wait another 18 months. He urged Smith to reconsider the projected timeline with an eye for speedier action.

What about my needs?

¶6. Delegations from less-developed countries were confused about the nature of the proposed reforms. Some of the Delegations reacted with suspicion to the Navigant report. They seemed concerned that Smith might overstep his mandate and that Executive Board and General Conference approved programs might be scrapped. ADG Smith fumbled the ball and did not make a convincing case that he is not making programmatic changes or decisions, but rather management and administrative ones that the Executive Board specifically requested.

¶7. Resistance to the reform is already building. The issue came up in a question and answer session on January 19th with the Director General who suggested bilateral consultations with the Education Sector.

¶8. The UK Ambassador told Ambassador Oliver that he has spoken to a number of developing states' ambassador who are upset about the reform. Among the most vocal opponents is the Indian ambassador (comment: this may be driven by a desire to protect the position of an Indian national in the sector). Norway has also expressed concern about maintaining the momentum of the reform process. Ambassador Oliver will meet on January 30 with the UK and Norway to discuss damage control.

Common concerns

¶9. Comment. It was not surprising that Delegations responded negatively when the long-awaited report from Navigant simply restated what the Delegations already knew long before Smith came on board. As a result, the Education Sector will have some fence mending to do. While the need for reform in the Education Sector is accepted by Member States, there is a fair amount of skepticism. This is clearly not the first attempt to

reform the Sector. There are doubts that the Sector can be reformed in isolation from the rest of UNESCO and concerns that the reform process may consume resources, financial and managerial, at the expense of programs. Delegations want the process to be quick and effective.

Risks to the U.S.

10. Comment continued. With an American ADG for Education and an American consulting firm in charge, the reputation risk is clear. The Mission will work through other Delegations on an Executive Board resolution concerning Secretariat cooperation and a shorter implementation time frame. Further, this "reform American style" already seems to have its detractors among the Delegations and Secretariat. While USAID has committed \$50,000 it is still unclear as to exactly how those funds will be used. Five countries, including Norway and the UK, have either paid or pledged funds to pay for Navigant Consulting.

OLIVER